



The Blue Sheet

Practical Application of Iowa's Blueprint for Permanency

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Volume 3

Achieving Permanency for Youth:

Ensuring Older Youth Leave Foster Care with a Permanent Family

"Research indicates that a child must have a relationship with at least one adult who is nurturing, protective, and fosters trust and security over time to become a psychologically healthy human being. Connecting with an adult who is devoted to and unconditionally loves a child is key to helping a child overcome the trauma of abuse and neglect. Stability of relationships is important because when the day to day consistency of caregiving is lost, it directly impacts a child's ability to trust, love and cope. Repeated moves of a child compound the adverse consequences of abuse and neglect. Safety and permanency in children's lives are a prerequisite of growth,

development, and successful well-being."¹

This *Blue Sheet* is about permanency for older youth. "National statistics show that older children stay in foster care longer and achieve permanency at lower rates than younger children. Those youth that age out of foster care often leave with few skills, minimal education, and inadequate preparation for living as productive, independent adults."²



¹ "Achieving Permanence for Children in the Child Welfare System: Pioneering Possibilities Amidst Daunting Challenges." Lorrie L. Lutz

² Enhancing Permanency for Older Youth in Out-of-Home Care, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Available on line: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/focus/enhancing/index.cfm

Life of the Case

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The key to building a productive social worker/youth relationship is engagement. It is not just building trust, but also assuring the youth's involvement in decision-making. It is important throughout the life of the case—from intake and assessment; through case planning and decision-making; to service provision, case reviews, and ultimately safe case closure.

From first contact, safety, permanency, and well-being should be the focus of our work. Permanency is critical to a youth's emotional stability. A good education, skill development, and life-long connections to supportive adults are critical for youth to be successful at transitioning to adulthood.

Youth deserve to leave foster care with the financial, emotional, educational and protective support provided to young people in permanent or intact families.

Strategies and Options to Enhance Permanence

- YOUTH VOICE ●FAMILY PRESERVATION OR REUNIFICATION AS THE FIRST PRIORITY●
- HONOR RELATIONSHIPS AND ASSURE CONNECTIONS WITH BIRTH FAMILY●
- PERSIST IN IDENTIFYING OPTIONS● FOCUS ON PRE- AND POST-PLACEMENT SERVICES●
- UTILIZE PERMANENCY ROUNDTABLES, DREAM TEAMS, BENCHMARK HEARINGS●
- TRANSITION SPECIALISTS AND AFTERCARE SERVICES●

It is never too late for youth to have permanency, including a permanent legal connection to a family through reunifying with birth parents, achieving adoption, placement in kinship care or legal guardianship.

Youth Voice: To achieve permanency, it is critical to engage youth in identifying options for permanent connections and in decision-making about their own lives. Iowa Code 232.91(4) states “If a child is of an age appropriate to attend a hearing but the child does not attend, the court shall determine if the child was informed of the child’s right to attend the hearing. A presumption exists that it is in the best interests of a child fourteen years of age or older to *attend all hearings and all staff or family meetings involving placement options or services provided to the child*. The department shall allow the child to attend all such hearings and meetings unless the attorney for the child finds the child’s attendance is not in the best interests of the child. If the child is excluded from attending a hearing or meeting, the department shall maintain a written record detailing the reasons for excluding the child. Notwithstanding sections 232.147 through 232.151, a copy of the written record shall be made available to the child upon the request of the child after reaching the age of majority.”

It is in every youth’s best interest to have permanent connections to loving adults.

How we discuss permanency with youth influences their response. The message should always be presented in the context of caring. Permanency is so unique for each youth; it is important to define permanency with the youth and use that definition as the foundation and basis for a plan for permanency. This requires that we listen carefully to the youth.

Permanency requires structured work to assure that the child has “love and belonging for a lifetime.”³ Identifying people in the youth’s life who are most important to them, now and in the past, is one way to start a discussion about permanency. Building connections (without pressure to consider placement options) meets an important need while gently introducing concepts of permanency. Tools available for exploring connections are helpful. Addressing grief and loss concurrently and the emotions that come with it (sadness, anger, betrayal, fear, and confusion) is critical to moving forward. Although there is no recipe to explain permanency to youth, it should be explained in real terms, in the context of caring, using the

definition developed with the youth.

Preserving the Family: When a youth is at risk of placement due to their own or their parents’ behavior, the first priority is maintaining a youth at home safely with their birth family. This would also include the non-custodial parent. Often, wrap-around services, specifically tailored for a parent and youth, are needed to preserve the youth at home. Family Team Decision-Making meetings help identify family support services that build on family strengths and coordinate needed community services. In some areas of the state, Juvenile Court Officers have significantly reduced placements and been successful at maintaining youth at home by utilizing therapeutic family therapy and multi-systemic support services. “Reunification can still be an option for youth who have been in care for years, as elapsed time may have allowed the family to address the issue that brought the youth into care.”⁴

Connections with Birth Family, Extended Family, and Kin:

When a youth cannot remain safely at home, kin should be the first placement option. Relatives also provide support for youth in care. Many relatives and others who had lost contact with youth or who had tried to maintain contact but were rebuffed by child welfare agencies in the past

³ Love and Belonging for a Lifetime: Youth Permanency in Child Welfare, Volume 26, Number 1, 2011, American Humane

⁴ Enhancing Permanency for Older Youth in Out-of-Home Care, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Available on line: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/focus/enhancing/index.cfm

are happy to reconnect with a youth. When located and asked to provide a permanent connection or to be involved in helping the youth transition, many are delighted to do so. Paternal relatives may not have received adequate emphasis initially from the child welfare system, but may provide the needed family connection.

Make kinship care a priority and consider guardianship or adoption where youth are to remain with relatives until adulthood. In 2010 Iowa Code Section 232.104(7)(b) was amended to provide an alternative to annual juvenile court review of permanency orders when a child is placed in guardianship of another person in CINA cases. The juvenile court is allowed to close the CINA case by transferring jurisdiction over the child's guardianship to the probate court under Chapter 633.

Persevere in Finding Permanency Options: Youth are experts in knowing their current and past relationships. Review with them the caring adults who are important in their life. Rather than ask youth about who they would consider being placed with, ask: "Who would you call at 2:00 in the morning if your car broke down somewhere?" or "Who would you want to see sitting in the front row of your high school/college graduation?"⁵ Mine the case file to identify meaningful relationships. Make sure that sibling relationships are supported and maintained. "Caregivers are uniquely positioned to help youth identify and connect with other important people in their lives. This not only allows youth to have support while reaching out and making (or re-making) connections, but it also provides support to the youth

while new (and old) relationships are developing and ideally providing the youth with a deeper sense of love and belonging."⁶

Focus on Pre- and Post-placement Services to Transition and Sustain the Placement: Once a permanent option is established, we must plan for any needed long-term support and develop options for the family to get any future services they may need. Youth *must* be part of this planning.

Casey Family Programs Permanency Roundtables: Permanency roundtables are structured professional case consultations designed to expedite permanency for youth in care through innovative thinking, the application of best practices, and the "busting" of systemic barriers. The focus of the meetings is to answer the following questions:

- How can we engage the youth in planning for permanence? What will it take to achieve permanency?
- What can we try that has been tried before?
- What can we try that has never been tried?
- How many things can we do concurrently?

Benchmark Hearings: A benchmark hearing is a special type of hearing that considers what the youth can do now; what the youth will need to do as an adult; and how others can help the youth get the skills, knowledge and abilities to be successful as they transition to adulthood. An important part of getting ready is identifying community and individual supports. At the same time, attention must be given to helping the youth prepare to live independently as an adult.

Attention is also given to normal growing up experiences, such as getting a driver's license, holding a part-time job, applying to college, and opening a bank account. Supports may include:

- **life skills assessment and training,**
- **educational, vocational and career planning,**
- **health care,**
- **counseling,**
- **identification of federal benefits and other public assistance available,**
 - housing: finding and keeping a safe place to live
 - special needs: help and support to assist with any special needs, and
 - help to figure out the youth's current relationship with their birth family and how to maintain healthy relationships with them as they reach adulthood.

Participants at the Benchmark Hearing include the youth, social worker, the county attorney, the GAL, and individuals able to provide pertinent information about school, medical or vocational background and needs.

Dream Team: A Dream Team, a voluntary type of family team decision-making meeting, comes together to discuss the dreams the youth have for their life and how those dreams may be achieved. The supportive team of adults and peers help plan and make connections to resources, education, employment, health care, housing, and supportive *personal and community relationships*. Through these connections and relationships,

⁵ Love and Belonging for a Lifetime: Youth Permanency in Child Welfare, Volume 26, Number 1, 2011, American Humane

⁶ Ibid, p. 21

the youth is better able to access and take advantage of the resources, knowledge, and skills to support themselves as they reach adulthood.

Aftercare services: The purpose of aftercare services is to provide services and supports to youth aged 18 - 20 who were formerly in foster care. The Iowa Aftercare Services Network (IASN) program provides each participant support and guidance through regular, individual meetings with a self-sufficiency advocate who help participants develop a plan for

attaining important life skills, connecting to community resources, and developing lifelong, healthy relationships.

Aftercare services make sure that participants have safe and stable housing, find needed medical care, help with school and employment goals, and any specific goals of the participant. Based on eligibility requirements, funding may be available for deposits, rent subsidy, transportation costs, clothing, and emergency and unexpected bills.

The Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program is a component of the aftercare program, available to

youth who were in state paid foster care on their 18th birthday (and who are not eligible for voluntary care, i.e., have graduated from high school or obtained a GED), with the expectation for youth to be attending post- secondary education/training, employed, or a combination of the two.

Youth who were in state paid foster care on their 18th birthday most often qualify for the Medicaid coverage group specifically for youth who “aged out” of foster care, known as Medicaid for Independent Young Adults (MIYA).

Undoing the “NO” to Permanence

- EXPLAIN THE BENEFITS OF PERMANENCY IN REAL TERMS ●
- SENSITIVELY EXPLORE REASONS FOR “NO” ●
- ADDRESS BARRIERS AND TRAUMA ●
- ACTIVELY EXPLORE OPTIONS ●
- PROVIDE PLANNING FOR TRANSITION ●
- SUPPORT THE PLACEMENT ●

What if the youth says “NO” to permanence?

We need to manage “saying no to permanency” in the same way we deal with other things that are in a child’s best interest to which they say no. Be respectful of the perspective and explore their rationale. They may be saying no to one permanency option, not all aspects of permanency.

“Many older youth in foster care have developed means of coping that often lead to outward presentations that drastically differ from what they are feeling underneath their external appearances.”⁷ Youth may want “love and belonging” to a family but say “No” when asked about permanency. We need to

sensitively explore the reasons for their response. Many youth cannot move forward in their life because of unresolved past trauma. Many youth feel loyalty to their birth family and see it as betrayal to consider another permanent family. Some youth cannot face the risk of rejection, especially if they have had lack of stability in placement. Some youth have lost hope. Some youth just don’t understand the benefits of permanency.

Nevertheless, we should creatively respond to specific reasons; e.g. have a peer talk with the youth about how they decided to be adopted; or discuss with the youth and family how the child can maintain connection to the birth family after permanency is achieved.

APPLA: When APPLA is the permanency goal, it should be reviewed at least every six months. The review should assure that another, more permanent option is not possible or appropriate. We must also continue to explore family connections for youth on an ongoing basis. Often father’s family has not been fully explored. Both paternal and maternal birth family circumstances, which may not have allowed connections in the past, could have changed over time.

Once a permanent option is established, we must plan for any needed long-term support and develop options for the family to get any future services they may need.

Trauma: Youth in foster care are uniquely positioned to have complex trauma. Many require

⁷ Ibid, p. 10

trauma informed therapy. The trauma they may have suffered from abuse or neglect is compounded by their loss of their parents, loss of siblings, loss of school, loss of friends, living with strangers, placement changes, loss of community and culture. Children who do not understand why they have been removed or what will happen next suffer from uncertainty. Because the loss is “ambiguous” the child’s process of healing is often stopped, “closure is prevented, and, ultimately, the child may experience impairment in functioning across many or all life domains (Lee & Whiting, 2007).”⁸ Behaviors as a result of trauma and loss can be misunderstood or misinterpreted.

One model being implemented by caseworkers around the country provides youth a willing listener about their losses, helps them reconnect with important people in their lives, and helps them achieve permanency. “Continuing to provide a safe space and support for youth to manage their expectations, process their fears and concerns, and communicate about their relationships will increase the successes they find in building life-long families and networks of support.”⁹

Darla L. Henry and Gregory Manning have developed a model for caseworkers to use with youth in discussing permanency that addresses trauma concurrently. “The 3-5-7 Model consists of three (3) tasks, five (5) conceptual questions, and seven (7) interpersonal skill elements that guide activities and

exercises toward assisting youth in their permanency work.” **The 3 tasks** that must be completed by youth around their life events are clarification, integration and actualization. Youth explore separation and loss experiences, caring and hurtful relationships, and potential paths to permanent connections.¹⁰

The **7 interpersonal elements** and social work/caregiver abilities, including the attitudes and beliefs of those assisting in this work, are vital to providing the foundation for the work of the 3 tasks and 5 questions (Henry, 2005).¹¹

Five [5] questions are used with 5 activities to support the 3 tasks for youth:

- Who am I? -- Picture Memories Activity
- What happened to me? -- Lost Line Activity
- Where am I going? -- Life Map Activity
- How will I get there? -- Collage Activity
- When will I know I belong? -- Life Book Development Activity¹²

The skills or elements utilized to

complete the 3-5-7 model include:

- **engage** youth and families in activities that explore their lives
- **recognize** that painful feelings are expressed in the behaviors of those who have been traumatized
- **listen** and to be present to the expression of all feelings
- **affirm** the pain and hurts from these experiences
- **be present** in order to provide the opportunity for youth to do the work of grieving their emotions and processing their losses
- **offer a safe space** where the youth is comfortable expressing these feelings
- **respond briefly** when expressing acknowledgement and assurance to youth in order to maintain space in the youth’s grieving process and establish trust.”

The chart below, identifies symptoms across cognitive, emotional, and behavior domains.¹³



Table 1. Symptoms Associated with Separation, Grief, and Loss for Youth in Foster Care

Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioral
Depression	Hopeless/Helpless	Oppositional/Defiant
Anxiety/Shock	Suicidal ideation	Verbal/Behavioral aggression
Anger/Rage	Homicidal ideation	Not telling the truth
Emotional tantrums	Obsessive thoughts	Social withdrawal
Hypersensitive	Loss of touch with reality	Disturbed eating cycle
Over-reactive	Disbelief	Disturbed sleep cycle
Numbness	Confusion	Substance abuse
Irritability	Guilt/Self-blame	Somatic complaints

⁸ Integrating Child Welfare and Mental Health Practices: Actualizing Youth Permanency Using the 3-5-7 Model Darla L. Henry and Gregory Manning, Love and Belonging for a Lifetime: Youth Permanency in Child Welfare, Volume 26, Number 1, 2011, American Humane

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid p. 34

¹¹ Ibid, p. 35

¹² Ibid, p. 37-38

¹³ Ibid p. 32

Case Example

Excerpted from - Reinstating Parental Rights: Another Path to Permanency?¹⁴
Susan Getman and Steve Christian

The call was unexpected. Stunned, Cathy listened carefully as the social worker asked her, “Would you be interested in being part of Mark’s life again?” Some eight years earlier, after she had lost her parental rights, Cathy had hugged her first born, 6-year-old Mark,² one last time. She had given him a book with her Social Security number in it, hoping that when he was grown it would help him to find her. As the years passed, she assumed he had been adopted, but he never was. In fact, after several failed placements, he was struggling in a group home. The state child welfare agency’s connection specialist decided to locate and contact Cathy, thinking that she would be able to provide leads to extended family, or that Cathy’s own circumstances might have changed. Indeed, Cathy had turned her life around. As a young parent, she lost her first child due to substance abuse and domestic violence, and she vowed to make the changes that would prevent the loss of another child. She remarried, had another child, and was in college, preparing for a career in social services.

Reunification was not immediately considered. After months of visits and family counseling, however, Cathy, her husband, Mark, and the state social workers all agreed that Mark should be reunified with his mother and her family. In the absence of a statute authorizing the reinstatement of Cathy’s parental rights, Cathy had no recourse but to adopt her first born child. Cathy is now an advocate for a law in her state that would allow a court to reinstate a parent’s rights. She recently completed her social work internship in the same office that removed Mark from her many years ago.

Evaluating Your Permanency Practice¹⁵

1. How has the youth been engaged as active participant in the service process? How have you provided opportunities for the youth to make choices about their life? Have you listened carefully to preferences? Is the youth regularly participating in planning meetings and court hearings?
2. Does the youth have relationships on which he/she can rely into adulthood? Have connections been maintained with the birth family? Is the youth prepared to manage relationships with family in a healthy way?
3. For all youth on your case load, age 16 or older, is what the child should know, be able to do, and have as supports to be successful after the transition to adulthood occurs being developed now?
4. Are you persistent in overcoming system barriers to permanency and pursuing interventions that meet individual needs of the youth into adulthood?

RECOMMENDED READING

- *Integrating Child Welfare and Mental Health Practices: Actualizing Youth Permanency Using the 3-5-7 Model* Darla L. Henry and Gregory Manning, *Love and Belonging for a Lifetime: Youth Permanency in Child Welfare*, Volume 26, Number 1, 2011, American Humane, <http://www.americanhumane.org/assets/pdfs/children/protecting-children-journal/pc-26-1.pdf>
- *The Adolescent Brain, New Research and It’s Implications for Young People Transitioning from Foster Care*, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative
- *Toolkit: Youth Engagement Guide*, Jim Case Youth Opportunities Initiative, www.jimcaseyyouth.org

¹⁴ Love and Belonging for a Lifetime: Youth Permanency in Child Welfare, Volume 26, Number 1, 2011, American Humane p. 58

¹⁵ Guide to Reflective Practice, Human Systems and Outcomes, Inc., September, 2001